

Digital Learning Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

February 5, 2020

Attendees

- Nick Caruso — CAFE
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Josh Elliott — Fairfield University
- Karen Kaplan — Hamden Public Schools
- Dawn La Valle — Connecticut State Library
- Greg Mcverry — Southern Connecticut State University
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Brandon Rush — New Milford Public Schools
- Karen Skudlarek — University of Connecticut
- Jim Spafford — Manchester Adult Education
- Shelley Stedman — Bridgeport Diocese
- Chinma Uche — CREC
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Agenda

- Review and Discussion of 2020 Commission Strategic Initiatives

Meeting Notes

The items below represent an assimilation of ideas rather than a strict verbatim or chronological record of points shared.

Nick Caruso, Chair of the Digital Learning Advisory Council, welcomed the members and convened the meeting at approximately 1:30 PM. He thanked the members for their past participation and contributions, especially in the area of supporting digital learning competencies for students, teachers, and education leaders. He then encouraged member input to develop a set of recommendations for the Commission to consider. Following this introduction, Doug provided a brief overview of each of the following initiatives:

General Strategy

- Establish Educational Technology Vision

Digital Learning

- Support for Teacher Competencies
- Statute for Student Digital Competencies
- Strategic Planning Platforms
- Open Education Resources

Infrastructure

- E-rate RFP and Posted Proposals
- Libraries and the Digital Divide
- Eduroam
- Equity Assessment
- Access Points
- Reverse Auction

Data and Privacy

- Centralized Privacy and Security Training
- Educational Software Hub
- Trusted Learning Environment

The Digital Learning Advisory members highlighted the following topics from the list above as top priorities for their organizations and constituency groups.

Vision for Educational Technology

This topic stemmed originally from past discussions within the group around ways that the availability of high-capacity cellular networks (e.g., 5G) will influence teaching and learning. Andy DePalma addressed the need for direction or specifications for content development, offering some questions for consideration. With faster speeds provided by 5G and advanced wireless networks, what type of audio, video, 3D, virtual reality, and other quality and accessibility measures should educators be demanding? How will these new technology standards influence textbook and other traditional content providers? How can the education community influence content standards, in addition to the news and entertainment industries, which typically drive standards? He emphasized the need for education leaders and stakeholders to set marketplace expectations for content enabled by new technologies such as 5G.

Nick echoed the need for standards that cast a vision for how technology can support teaching and learning, a topic that has come up since the launch of the Connecticut Education Network. This high-capacity network affords the ability to deliver engaging educational content at high speeds and top quality. Doug mentioned the exemplars developed through Verizon's 5G EdTech Challenge, in collaboration with the NYC Media Lab. Scott Zak noted that leaders in higher education already adhere to best practices in instructional design that leverage technology and encouraged the group not to pursue the creation of separate standards but to adopt existing benchmarks of

state, national, and international researchers. Dawn La Valle agreed, noting the work of Bryant University and the University of Connecticut, among others, that might inform the Commission's efforts to guide educators and content providers on emerging technologies. Shelley Stedman identified the defense industry and agencies as traditionally driving standards, and Greg Mcverry noted the open [xAPI](#) standard for online and offline learning.

Jim Spafford raised the issue of addressing the need to prepare students for the workforce. He noted efforts on behalf of the [Governor's Workforce Council](#) to translate the needs of state employers into skills that students should have. Jim encouraged the Commission to engage with this group to align efforts between education and workforce preparation.

Cybersecurity

Karen Kaplan raised the topic of cybersecurity as a top priority for her town (Hamden) and for the State. She framed protection against cyberattacks as an equity issue. Towns, school districts, libraries, and other public institutions that have staff limited in numbers and skills remain more susceptible to attacks than do better resourced communities. School districts with smaller budgets and that do not invest in proper intrusion protection and detection are also more vulnerable than districts that can afford such services. She suggested that the Commission take steps to provide price discounts on the sophisticated tools that learning institutions need to protect themselves from attack. Doug acknowledged the need and pointed to CEN's distributed denial of service (DDoS) mitigation services as an example of how centralized protections can provide equity of access to expensive but necessary services. He noted that CEN mitigated close to 1,000 DDoS attacks in 2019.

To raise awareness of prioritizing cybersecurity investments at the local level, Karen encouraged CABA to articulate this need to its members, who approve budgets at the local level. Nick agreed but cited pushback from some board members and superintendents who are currently looking at laying off teachers because of budget reductions. He and others acknowledged that the need for a well-funded and staffed cybersecurity program — not just tools — remains a priority for anchor institutions, from schools to towns, libraries to hospitals.

Scott encouraged the adoption of hosting and software via cloud services. Major providers such as Amazon, Google, and Microsoft generally provide more sophisticated cyber protections than local schools and towns can provide. Greg echoed that suggestion and asked about the provision of such services through State agencies. Doug shared with the group the [Cloud Connect](#) service, free to CEN members, providing direct peering connections to top-tier cloud providers.

Karen noted that technology professionals from nearby towns have offered assistance to Hamden in response to a recent attack and suggested that CEN could coordinate such volunteers for future needs. Doug welcomed the suggestion and noted that the Network leadership and advisories have discussed the development of a "volunteer

corps." The liability risks that accompany such an approach — access to privileged data as well as the possibility that volunteers could worsen rather than improve the effects of a cyber-attack — remain key considerations.

Members of the group acknowledged the common need for high-quality training and auditing services. Karen Kaplan praised CEN's cybersecurity session last fall, with insights shared by Network members. She did note that only 20 or so districts attended, though every town could benefit from these sessions. Other groups such as CIRMA also provide free professional development. Karen Skudlarek reminded members that the CEN Conference (May 7 – 8, 2020) will address cybersecurity in an in-depth, four-hour session on Day 1 and a dedicated "Security" strand of workshops on Day 2. Dawn La Valle stated that the Connecticut State Library has also provided training for local libraries to help assess their privacy posture and take steps to protect their patrons and digital assets. Brandon Rush expressed the need both for standard training resources, such as "safe" phishing campaigns for staff development, as well as high-touch audit services. Andy reminded the members that the regional education service centers (RESCs) provide such audits. Jim Mindek suggested that funding flow through the RESCs to provide cyber services to schools in each of the six RESC regions.

Libraries and the Digital Divide

The Advisory Council members also expressed support for libraries to help bridge the digital divide. Greg Mcverry called this his top priority, given the impact that local libraries can have in supporting students of all ages. He shared briefly about a program he runs to partner K – 12 schools with town libraries to assist students in building their own Web sites, video podcasts, and other elements of a digital portfolio.

Shelley Stedman referenced a [study in Massachusetts](#) that identifies the role of school libraries in addressing all aspects of the digital divide: access to the Internet, computing devices, digital literacy coaching, and technical support. Dawn noted the Connecticut State Library's role in supporting digital literacy among students through local libraries. Greg shared that the "homework gap," affecting students without access to technology outside school, also affects higher education. As an example, he shared that he assigns online-intensive work early in each month, when students' data plan allowances are full. Doug remarked that the list of initiatives includes several projects that address the "digital divide": Eduroam, a mobile hotspot program, and even legislation to require that students demonstrate digital literacy skills as a graduation requirement.

Alternative Learning Days

Another topic that did not appear on the list of proposed initiatives but that members saw as a priority is the ability of schools to leverage technology for instruction on days when school cannot take place because of inclement weather or other emergencies. Karen Kaplan suggested that schools could develop stores of curriculum and instructional materials — both analog and digital — to provide personalized learning experiences to students.

Nick agreed and noted discussions at the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) on this same topic. While lobbying to the Connecticut General Assembly or legislative changes will not take place during the upcoming, short session, some districts are taking steps to leverage technology for distance learning. For example, South Windsor has intentionally designed 182 days (the state mandate is 180) into the school calendar, with the intent of conducting school with prepared materials for students to use on two snow days. Jim Mindek pointed to the work of David Telesca, formerly with Kaynor Technical High School, where he implemented a robust set of digital tools and practices to foster learning even on snow days, with great support and enthusiasm from teachers and families. Nick closed the topic by highlighting the need for a state vision for teaching and learning to pave the way for competency-based learning — leveraging practices such as alternative learning days — rather than seat time as measures of success.

Innovation Grants

To support such a vision for learning and address fundamental concerns around equity, Scott asked if state grants were available. The group discussed sources such as the Dalio Foundation, with its pledge of support for education innovation in our state. Dawn suggested that if the Commission were to request funding for some or all of these initiatives, such a proposal would need to be focused and define quantifiable outcomes. Karen Kaplan also encouraged the Commission to tie proposals to the Department of Education and General Assembly's priorities, especially equity of access. Scott also tied education to economic development, in that having innovative schools remains a draw to attract and retain businesses and high-skilled workers to Connecticut. Jim Spafford encourage the group to take into account the needs of adult learners as well as students in K – 12 and institutions of higher education. He cited the 322,000 adults in Connecticut without a high school diploma as just one population that the State should consider when designing solutions to support lifelong learning.

Adjournment

Nick thanked the members for their time and input and encouraged Advisory Council members to continue bringing topics of concern and opportunity to this group and the Commission. He concluded the meeting at approximately 3:00 PM.